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Reformed and Biblical Counseling

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Reformed and Biblical Counseling

Abstract

"What is the difference between Biblical counseling and Christian counseling? In Reformed circles, is Biblical Counseling the norm or are people encouraged to seek professional counseling help?"

Posting about reformed and Biblical counseling from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/answering-your-question-reformed-and-biblical-counseling/>

Keywords

In All Things, Answering Your Question, Biblical counseling, Jay Adams, Christian counseling, counseling

Disciplines

Christianity | Clinical Psychology | Counseling Psychology | Psychology

Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

Answering Your Question: Reformed and Biblical Counseling

 inallthings.org/answering-your-question-reformed-and-biblical-counseling/

Mark Christians

An article called [The Rise of Biblical Counseling](#) states that “Biblical Counseling” is prevalent in “Reformed” traditions (see quote: “Since the mid-1960s, when Presbyterian pastor Jay Adams first laid out its principles, biblical counseling has become dominant in conservative Christian denominations that follow Reformed (or Calvinist) theology.”). The article also shows how dangerous it can be for a person to be counseled by someone who has no education in counseling or psychology. As a Reformed organization, what insight can “In All Things” bring to this conversation? In your branch of “Reformed”, is this type of “Biblical Counseling” the norm or are people encouraged to seek professional counseling help?—Kelly

Jay Adams published his seminal work, [Competent to Counsel](#), on Biblical Counseling in 1970. He provides a comprehensive description of his [Nouthetic Counseling](#), also referred to by Adams as [Nouthetic Confrontation](#). Nouthetic can mean “admonish,” “warn,” “teach,” or “to put sense into.” The three basic elements of Nouthetic Counseling are recognizing “a need for a change in the person confronted, who may or may not put up some resistance”¹; the second element being that problems are solved nouthetically by verbal means; and the third element being a beneficent motive to help the person and not harm them with shame; like the love or “concern of a parent for his child.”²

Adams posited that the Bible is sufficient as the textbook for counseling. The goal of counseling is change – in conformity with God’s revealed will, not necessarily the selfish desires of the client. Positive change, according to Adams, can only take place by the power of the Holy Spirit and with a Biblical counselor who is qualified through personal holiness and a knowledge of the Word of God.

A more contemporary view of Biblical Counseling from persons like [David Powlison](#), broaden the scope of psychology and psychotherapy beyond the pages of Scripture alone. This illustrates that not all Biblical counselors are the same in terms of training, experience, competence, and worldview. Psychologists, and those who wish to be psychologists someday, must discern carefully how they view the client, how they view the world, and how they view ‘problems in living’ or psychopathology. While God’s word is truly inspired, it may not contain all the knowledge and information needed to function as a trained Christian therapist.

Christian Counseling is gaining ground and respect in the mental health community and along with Biblical Counseling; however, there are other views that also convey a Christian perspective on counseling (e.g., Integration View, Christian Psychology View, a Levels-of-Explanation View, and a Transformational View). A therapist trained in Biblical Counseling is more likely to view counseling as a Christian ministry and carrying out this ministry by inviting Christ to restore our souls.³ Biblical Counselors believe that “all counseling attempts pastoral work, shepherding the souls of the wandering, suffering sheep.”⁴ Regardless of the strand of Christian Counseling one supports, “What is most important (at a minimum) is that the therapy follows techniques and establishes goals that conform to a biblical understanding of persons and

that are well tested and shown to be effective.”⁵ Moes and Tellinghuisen go on to describe several characteristics of a therapist that are compatible with a scriptural understanding of human nature; including the ability to provide empathy, caring concern and unconditional acceptance; being present and future oriented, rather than focused on the past; stress accountability and responsibility; an appreciation of biological constraints on social contexts; and are action oriented and slightly less insight oriented.

A clinical psychologist who is carrying out a traditional type of counseling will be focused on diagnosing the problem or disorder; identifying possible goals for the client to achieve; and utilizing a variety of techniques to reduce the symptoms and meet the therapy goals. This process can occur without any thought on the part of the therapist as to how their faith or Christian values could or should influence the counseling process. Positive changes can certainly happen in the life of clients who are being treated by a clinical psychologist. The key distinction is that the therapist does not rely on any Christian assumptions or beliefs about sin, salvation, or redemption while carrying out their professional counseling responsibilities.

Christians who need to seek out a Christian counselor or therapist have a responsibility to determine the capabilities, expertise, and licensure of the counselor before beginning a therapeutic relationship. Finding a qualified therapist can include a direct inquiry to the agency where the therapist works to learn about specific areas of expertise, along with session fees and whether sessions are covered by insurance. Other ways to find a good therapist would be asking close friends, family members, or pastor who may have knowledge of competent therapists in the area. Word of mouth can be an effective way to determine whether a therapist should be contacted by an individual or family. Simply having the title of Biblical Counselor may not qualify a person as a trained professional and capable of helping any and all persons through psychological crises. The basic message is “caveat emptor” or “let the buyer beware” in regards to whether a person seeks out a Christian Counselor, Biblical Counselor or a Clinical Psychologist.

Footnotes

1. Adams, J. E. [Competent to counsel](#). (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1970) 45. ↩
2. Adams, 49. ↩
3. Johnson, E. L. (Ed). *Psychology and Christianity* (2nd ed.). (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010). ↩
4. Powlison, D. (2010). A biblical counseling view. In *Psychology and Christianity* (2nd ed.). (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010) 258. ↩
5. Moes, P. & Tellinghuisen, D. J. [Exploring psychology and Christian faith](#). (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic., 2014) 245. ↩